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TECHNIQUES FOR CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL (NEGATIVE) THOUGHTS

Try Gathering Evidence 'For' and 'Against' Your Unhelpful Thoughts

When you have a negative thought about yourself (e.g., I am a failure, I am not getting good enough), challenge this thought by gathering evidence 'for' the thought and evidence 'against' the thought.

This strategy will help you to put things into perspective. Instead of focusing solely on the negative aspect of the thought and believing it, you can also start to look at evidence that disputes that thought so that you can work past it and stop dwelling on it.

Find evidence FOR my belief versus evidence AGAINST my belief and evaluate.

Try Finding Alternative Explanations

Ask yourself what other evidence can you find?

What other explanation could there be for this event and thought?



Example: If people look at you when you enter a room, what reasons are there besides thinking that everyone is judging you? If someone fails to phone, what other explanations are there besides that they have forgotten about you? List them!

This technique is helpful as it puts things into perspective. When we start to think negatively about an event it is hard to view it from any other angle apart from the one that you hold. This technique can help break that cycle.

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Try The 'Double Standard' Technique

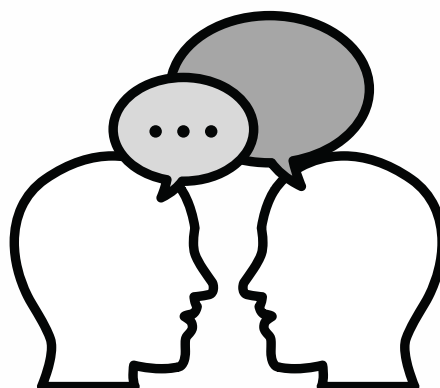
When you can catch yourself stuck on an unhelpful thought (e.g., I am a failure, I am worthless, I am unlovable) it might be helpful to ask yourself:

- (1) What would you say to someone else who was saying the same thing about themselves?
- (2) Would you think that thought of someone else? Why and why not?

Try Surveying Other People's Opinions

Sometimes people get locked into unhelpful thinking patterns (e.g., I am unlovable) but they never ask others for their opinion and see whether these confirm or disprove these thoughts.

So next time you catch yourself trying to mind-read what other people think about you, check out if that is really what they are thinking.



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Try Anticipating Future Reactions

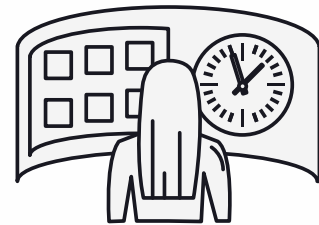
When a stressful everyday event makes you feel frustrated/angry/sad etc, ask yourself "How will I feel about (the event) in..."

...a week from now?

...a month from now?

...a year from now?

...5 years from now?"



This can help you to put that emotion/feeling into perspective and hopefully reduce the intensity of the emotion.

Try Asking Yourself "Is this realistic and helping?"

Q: Is this unhelpful thought realistic?

For example: instead of thinking "I have to be liked by everybody or I am worthless", try thinking a helpful response such as "I would prefer to be liked by everybody but sometimes this is not possible and my worth should not depend on it"

Q: Is this thought helpful?

1. Is my thinking helping me to achieve my goals?
2. Is my thinking helping me to get on with others whom I care about?
3. Is my thinking helping me to feel good about myself and life?
4. Do the advantages of thinking this way outweigh the disadvantages?

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Try Decatastrophising

To develop a balanced and realistic viewpoint you need to take into account ALL the things that could happen to you, not just the 'here and now' problems.

Try the following:

1. Describe the upsetting event: Get a \$100 parking fine.
2. Rate how upset this makes you from 1 – 100 (100 = really upset): 80/100.
3. Now think what would be the worst thing in the world that could make you really upset and place that at 100: losing my family.
4. Now, re-rate how upsetting this event would make you in comparison to losing your family: 2/100.

This technique helps to put life events into perspective.

If your re-rating is still fairly high then you know that your feelings are justified.

Try Benefiting From The Negative

If something in your life is indeed negative, think about what ways it might actually also benefit you. For example, how might not getting a job be an advantage? Put simply, if you have a disappointment try to find some good in it. Turn the lemon into lemonade.

Questions that help you adopt an alternative viewpoint include:

- Is there another way of looking at this problem that will help me feel better?
- What might someone else whose views I trust think about this?
- What would I say to another person who came to me with this problem?
- How might I get stronger as a result of this?

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Try A Thought Stopping Exercise

Use this exercise if you have thoughts that you continually think over and over and over in your mind.

Step (1) First you need to identify when you start to think of these thoughts. You need to become aware of when these thoughts enter your mind. There may be certain triggers that make you think of these thoughts more often.

Step (2) When you notice that you are ruminating on these thoughts (i.e. thinking them over and over) you need to shout out “STOP”. You can also yell out “stop” and clap your hands, yell “stop” and hit a pillow, yell “stop” and place your hand in the freezer for 5 seconds....anything that will let your mind know that you are not going to be thinking those thoughts anymore.

Step (3) After you have yelled “stop” you need to replace your thoughts with other thoughts. Remember.....if you take something away, you need to replace it with something! So, start to make a list of other things that you can do so that you start to think of other thoughts.



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Try A Designated Worry Time

It is hard for people NOT to worry. Worrying is a natural part of everyday life. It would be unusual for someone to say that they have never worried before as worrying is NORMAL. But sometimes worrying can get us down when we constantly worry ALL the time.

This is an exercise that sets aside a certain time every day for you to worry in.

Step (1) Decide on a time that you will worry in. For example, straight after dinner, for an hour between 3pm and 4pm - anytime that will suit you. However, worrying just before you go to bed may not be so helpful.

Step (2) During the day if you start to worry use your thought stopping exercise and remind yourself that you can worry later in your special worry time.

Step (3) In your worry time you have to try and worry as much as possible about anything you want. You can write, you can sit there and think, you can talk to yourself or someone else if they are willing to listen. Try to get in as much worrying as possible as you cannot worry at any other time of the day.

